

**'Vintage PAS' haunts Pakatan as BN preps for GE**  
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As the winning candidate in the Bagan Pinang by-election, which started BN's run of by-election victories to date, Mohd Isa Samad is hitting the Merlimau campaign trail as a good luck charm.

Speaking at a packed venue in Permatang Pasir yesterday, the former Negri Sembilan menteri besar made it clear that he's not there just to help win the by-election.

A win in Merlimau will strengthen BN and (Prime Minister) Najib (Abdul Razak). The mandate now is from 2008, and that was for (former premier Abdullah Ahmad Badawi).

"We want to give Najib a good mandate and it starts with a clean sweep beginning from Bagan Pinang," Isa (left) told an excited audience of about 300, made up of mostly middle-aged Malay folk.

This would explain the heavy campaigning by BN, which appears to be pulling out all the stops to secure a victory in Merlimau, which has never fallen into opposition hands before.

With only five Malacca state assembly seats conceded to DAP in the 2008 polls, one more for Pakatan will not change the government.

But with the general election expected soon, one area lost could affect morale and make life just that much more difficult for BN.

Chief Minister Mohd Ali Rustam (left in picture), whose big ambition to climb up Umno's leadership ladder is no secret, is well aware of what a stunning victory in Malacca in the next polls can do for his image and is pulling out all stops.

The controversial but undeniably popular chief minister has been on the campaign trail every day, gracing up to six events from morning to night.

However, Mohd Ali has so far been put on the defensive by Pakatan Rakyat, which is now honing its campaign on the Malaccan government's alleged mismanagement and "arrogance".

Leading the pack on this front are the DAP assemblypersons who tell the relatively small crowds at Pakatan events anecdotes of Mohd Ali's misbehaviours in the state assembly.

**Ali too slick for Pakatan?**

"In the state assembly, Mohd Ali always slams (PAS spiritual leader) Nik Aziz (Nik Mat) and when I stand up to defend (Nik Aziz), BN will not allow me," said Ayer Keroh assemblyperson Khoo Poay Tiong.

But what usually gets the crowd murmuring and shaking their heads is the size of Malacca's public debt - around RM500 million, according to the Auditor-General's Report.

Khoo speaks of "white elephant projects", such as the Malacca go-kart track and Ayer Keroh

airport, which he claims cost RM240 million but serves only one flight a day.

“(Mohd Ali) said that the airport will serve flights by AirAsia and Malaysia Airlines, which have signed agreements... (and when this did not happen) he rented a plane and gave a free ride to schoolchildren to prove that the airport is in use.

“I suggested to him that since there are no flights, why don't we open the airport to the public. He asked me what for? I said, to fly kites. Ali Rustam should go fly kites,” he said to laughter.

But nothing PAS or Pakatan say seems to stick to the cavalier but unbashful chief minister.

Even when it comes to inflation, a Pakatan campaign point which appeared to appeal to voters, the topic was swung around by Mohd Ali, who said that if Pakatan could keep prices down then the dowry for “PAS virgins” must be cheaper too.

“Then I'd like a PAS virgin too, granted that my wife agrees, of course,” he said repeatedly at several events in caustic Malaccan humour which, unlike Pakatan's so far sober approach, is drawing in the crowds.

While Mohd Ali's speeches appear candid and off the cuff, they are masterfully scripted and timed perfectly to go with dissemination of campaign material, which also include tazkirah in mosques that are broadcast on loudspeakers prior to the azan.

### **Deviant fatwas**

Skillfully, Mohd Ali has managed to turn aside all of PAS' offensives and place them all under the banner of 'slander', using 'vintage PAS' (the pre-'PAS for all' rebranding exercise) as a lynchpin.

With Mohd Isa, and Deputy Premier Muhyiddin Yassin backing BN up yesterday, the coalition campaign involved rehashing old stories of 'deviant fatwas', decrying that PAS was willing to lie through its teeth for political gains.

“The opposition has a habit of seeing only our wrongdoings and exaggerating. They label people who don't support PAS as kafir (non-Muslim) or jahiliah (ignorant).

“So many fatwa have been 'issued' (like) voting Umno will land you in Hell and meat from animals slaughtered by Umno people is haram,” said Muhyiddin.

Mohd Isa, too, had a jolly time telling his audience that Nik Aziz had said that voting for PAS three times will earn you the same reward as performing the haj pilgrimage.

Coincidentally or otherwise, a rather pixelised banner, which PAS has now decried as fake, which reads “Undi PAS masuk syurga” (Vote for PAS to enter Heaven) cropped up this morning.

With large billboards across Merlimau reading Selamatkan Malaysia dari fitnah dan pembohongan (Save Malaysia from slander and lies), PAS will need to think of a more creative way to prove its case to the constituents.

But with Mohd Ali as by-election director covering all the bases, PAS has yet to break much ground.

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